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FOREIGN NOTES

WHY THE SWISS ARE WELL EDUCATED.

The Schoolmaster.

The conference of the Swiss teachers is being held this year at Zürich. The choice of a conference town was very appropriate, as Zürich holds an educational position second to, perhaps, hardly any town in Europe. Through the inclusion of eleven outlying parishes with the city, Zürich has become the largest town in Switzerland, its population being nearly 120,000. The educational interests of the town are under the oversight of a Central School Board and five District School Boards. Each of the five districts chooses a member of the Central School Board for each 6,000 of its inhabitants. The president of this body, who is a paid official, is elected by the votes of the whole town. Each member of the Central School Board is *ex officio* a member of the School Board in his district. In addition to these *ex officio* members, the District School Boards have each from eleven to nineteen additional members. The manner in which these additional members are chosen is interesting to English readers. The united body of the teachers in each district forms the Teachers' Council for that district, whilst all the teachers in the service of the town form the Teachers' Council for the town. The president of the Teachers' Council for each district is by virtue of his office a member of the School Board for the district. In addition, a number of teachers, varying from four to ten in each district, are chosen by their fellows as members of the School Board for the district. On the Central School Board besides the members chosen by popular vote, the following are empowered to take part in the debates, but have no vote: The presidents of the teachers' councils in the districts, the president of the teachers' council for the town, and a member chosen by the residents of the District School Boards. There is yet another safeguard against crude legislation by theorists in education. All regulations for the conduct of the schools passed by the Central School Board must be submitted to the teachers' council for the town, and approved by that body, before they take effect. The school buildings of Zürich are of various types, ranging from the country school house to the magnificent and palatial buildings now commonly associated with towns. A school building lately completed is estimated to have cost £60,000, whilst a new building, planned for twenty-four class rooms and two halls for physical exercise, will cost

£32,000. But it is not only on the buildings that the people of Zürich spend money. The estimated cost of school maintenance only for the present year is over £65,000, a sum greater in proportion to the population than is spent by the London School Board on school maintenance and building combined.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN SCHOOLS.

The Schoolmaster, July 7, 1894.

In connection with the Convocation of Canterbury, held on Wednesday, the House of Laymen received from Earl Nelson an *ad interim* report of the Committee on Christian Education in Public Elementary Schools. It contained the following conclusions of the sub-committee appointed to consider the Birmingham system:

"(1) That the Birmingham system as it exists is far better than a total absence of religious instruction; and the promoters of these schemes, both the Nonconformists who initiated the system, and Churchmen who are now working on similar lines, deserve the highest credit for their efforts on behalf of the Christian training of children in Birmingham. (2) That for completeness and thoroughness the instruction thus given cannot be compared with that provided in a good National school. (3) That if a School Board would permit their teachers to take part in such religious instruction and to work in concert with the ministers of the various denominations, the Birmingham schemes might be developed into a workable system. (4) That, failing this, such a result could only be achieved in rural Board schools where the clergy might prove sufficient for the number of church children under instruction, or in urban Board Schools in districts where the mass of the elementary education is in the hands of Voluntary schools, and the Board school children requiring religious instruction are comparatively few. (5) That it is essential, both in justice to the religious convictions of the parent, and in order to secure definiteness in the character of the instruction, that such a register should be kept as will enable the parent to indicate the particular form of religious instruction which he desires for his child, so that it may be provided accordingly. (6) That, if the regular teachers cannot be so employed, ministers of religion are, generally speaking, the fittest persons to give the instruction under such a Voluntary system, both because they are the most competent for the work and because from their office they interfere less with the position of the secular teacher in the estimation of the children."

The report was adopted.

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"A very heavy responsibility", says Dr. Fitch in the course of a particularly weighty and able article, in the current *Nineteenth Century*, "rests upon Mr. Athelstan Riley and his friends, who in pursuit of an object which they must know to be unattainable—the acceptance of disputable theological dogmas as the basis of religious and moral instruction in the rate-aided school—have placed in serious peril the simple, reverent, and

appropriate scriptural teaching which is being given, with such great advantage and without raising any controversial difficulty, to half a million London children. If anything could add to one's sense of the mischievous character of the polemic which has been carried on in the meeting room of the Board the last few months, it would be the manner and spirit of the whole discussion. Christians and non-Christians alike have been scandalised, not only by the waste of time and the neglect of the proper business of the Board, but by the acrimony, the vulgarity, and the essentially unreligious tone in which a question of the most sacred importance has been treated by the disputants. No one who has listened in the Board room to these angry zealots, or who read in the press the report of their speeches, could find it easy to believe that the matter in hand was the spiritual side of the nature of young children, their training in reverence and in goodness, the formation of their character, the regulation of their conduct, or the development and nurture of their higher life."

Journal of Education, August 1, 1894.

Dr. Fitch has preëminently the art of summing up a controversy and pronouncing a calm, grave judgment after the heated wranglings of party advocates, which must carry conviction to all indifferent onlookers, like the Pope's in "The Ring and the Book." It is more the way the arguments are put than any novelty in the arguments themselves that impresses us in his *Nineteenth Century* article on "Religion in Primary Schools." Those who have not read it should read it, and we shall not forestall their pleasure by giving them extracts or a summary. We may note, however, for one and all, the conclusions he reaches, from a study of the recent development of national education in all civilized countries. From the analogy of France, Belgium, and the United States, it is perfectly clear what will happen if Mr. Athelstan Riley's counsels prevail. State-aided schools will be completely secularized, and religious instruction will be given only in voluntary schools supplied by religious enthusiasts. Is this a prospect that commends itself to God-fearing parents who look only to the welfare of their children?

THE GOUIN METHOD.

Journal of Education, August 1, 1894.

That the Gouin method is very much alive is proved conclusively by the numerous letters which our note of last month has provoked, and of

which we publish three. That the method, in the hands of a competent teacher, may produce excellent results we have never denied, and as a protest against mere book-learning and gerund-grinding we have heartily welcomed it. What we do deny, and shall continue to deny till we are shown our error, is that there is any originality either in the linguistic principles or in their application as set forth in M. Gouin's book. We have also strong evidence, if evidence were wanted, that, as practised by a second-rate teacher, nay, by M. Gouin himself, it is singularly liable to degenerate into a dull, mechanical routine, exercising no mental powers save the memory.

MR. ACLAND'S SIX INSPECTORS.

The Schoolmaster, July 14, 1894.

Discussing Mr. Acland's appointments to the Inspectorate last week, we inadvertantly overlooked the elevation to the Inspectorate of Mr. T. Jones, M. A. Mr. Jones, as those who recall the particulars of his career given at the time of his appointment, may remember, served a five years' pupil teachership, was trained at Bangor, worked for ten years as a head master, for thirteen years as an Inspector's assistant, and for eleven years as Sub-Inspector. Mr. Jones's record of work in connection with elementary education, therefore, is longer even than that of Mr. Northrop, totalling up as it does to over forty-one years. It is interesting to note that of the six Inspectors appointed by Mr. Acland Mr. Jones has the longest record of practical acquaintance with elementary school work—in all forty-one years. Mr. Northrop had thirty-nine years' experience; Mr. Foster, M. A., twenty-five years; Mr. Holman, M. A., fourteen years; Mr. Barnett, M. A., three years (as a School Board member); and Mr. Roberts, M. A., two years (the earlier stages of pupil teachership).